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## Activities of the Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia in the aspect of ethnic policy of the Polish state

**Abstract:** Some of the most important principles of state ethnic policy are to ensure national and ethnic minorities possibility of continuing their national distinction and to enable them participation in public life, including political. The German minority residing in Poland, the most numerous among national minorities, participates actively in realization of the above-mentioned principles. The German minority is most numerous in Upper Silesia area where since 1990 the biggest minority organization in Poland, the Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia (TSKN), has been operating.

The basic aim of this article was to make an attempt to describe TSKN activities in the aspect of Polish state ethnic policy assumptions. Research tools and methods used were: historical, comparative, statistical, source study and literature review. Essential research was also study of Internet sources, first and foremost Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration websites as well as TSKN websites. Research hypothesis had been formulated, according to which the Third Republic of Poland ethnic policy not only enable keeping national identity for the German minority living in the region of Opole Silesia, but also creates for the minority appropriate conditions to participate in public life of the region. As a result of research process above-mentioned hypothesis was verified positively.

**Key words:** Ethnic policy, the German minority, the Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia

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### Introduction

The basic aim of writing this article was to characterize the Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia (TSKN) in the context of realized ethnic policy of the Polish state. The author made an attempt on explanation of above-mentioned policy and realization of this policy guidelines, basing on the example of most numerous national minority in Poland – the German minority. The choice of Opole Silesia was not random measure, as most numerous group of Germans in Poland live there and have had their own organization acting actively in public-political life since the beginning of the 1990s.

Among research tools and methods which were used, there were i.a.: historical, comparative, source study and literature review. Study of the Internet sources was also important – official websites of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration and TSKN. Research hypothesis was formulated, according to which the Polish state ethnic policy not only enables keeping national identity of the German minority living in the region of Opole Silesia, but also – thanks to activities of this minority organization – creates appropriate conditions for this group to participate much in the public life in the region.

### Ethnic policy in Poland

The notion of 'ethnic policy' is present in the literature of the subject along with issues as 'national policy', 'policy towards national and ethnic minorities' and 'minority policy.' Polish researchers take a position on synonymy of above mentioned definitions, emphasizing almost identical meaning of 'national' and 'ethnic' policy. Yet, they show slight differences between them, according to which the first defines usually historical aspect of the issue, whereas the second – contemporary aspect. Moreover, they think that the research field of 'national policy' includes broader scope of state activities containing three elements: policy towards titular nation (i.e. aiming at creating or proclamation of own state, in which is the majority), ethnic and national minorities as well as diaspora. 'Ethnic policy' is characterized by narrower terms, focusing on detailed state Policy towards national and ethnic minorities (Chałupczak, Zenderowski, Baluk, 2015, p. 26). For the needs of writing this article, it is recognized, as Henryk Chałupczak stated (2014, p. 24), that „ethnic policy is a group of actions, accepted and accomplished by the state and its organs, undertaken to solve problems connected with the existence of national minorities in the state.”

In the opinion of Radosław Zenderowski and Jakub Pieńkowski (2014, p. 203), state ethnic policy can be characterized by three diverse aims: “a) acceptance of multiethnic and multiculturalism reflected in state political organization and in particular policies, b) exclusion minorities [...] from the mainstream of public, political and economic life and preclusion from their integration with titular nation, c) aiming at 'ethnic entirety' (from assimilation to physical extermination and expulsions).” Depending on chosen strategy, three different (although often intermingled) models of realized policy can be separated:

- pluralistic, in which state i.a. accepts and supports financially activities of minorities, allowing autonomy and bilingualism in the regions where minorities dominate;
- integral – the state accepts individual equality of citizens, emphasizing ethnic diversity of society, which the state does not support and rejects additional preferences for minorities;
- segregating – based on assumption of ethnic inequality, in which not only creating of minorities organization is forbidden, but also civil rights of minorities' members are restricted (Browarek, 2018, pp. 38–40).

In the period of so-called Polish People's Republic (it was unofficial but widespread used name of the state from 1944–1989) primary ethnic policy aim was exclusion of national minorities from the life mainstream and aiming at “ethnic entirety” of the state. Despite the fact that in chosen moments (connected especially with liberalization of political system in the second part of the 1950s) non-Polish national groups enjoyed some “licensed” autonomy (manifested in, for instance, creating for them social-cultural associations), permanently, although with different rate, still idea of one-nation state was realized (Madajczyk, 2004, pp. 45–54). It placed then ethnic Policy model as integral in the compulsory variety, evolving from time to time (especially towards chosen minorities) towards segregating model (Szczepański, 2020, p. 173). Alongside with the change of geopolitical conditions, at the turn of 1980s and 1990s, as well as the beginning of democratization process of political system in Poland, previous Policy towards minorities

was changed. Above-mentioned changes were i.a. in the subject of institution (previous powers of Ministry of Interior Affairs towards minorities were taken by Ministry of Culture and Art), law (i.e. connected with education and culture) and civil (the authorities began to treat minorities as rightful members of citizens of the state). Moreover, programs of almost all political groups noticed the need of keeping identity of non-Polish national groups in the scope of their culture, education and language (Łodziński, 2010, pp. 24–25). Above-mentioned finding lets, as H. Chałupczak stated, notice that contemporary ethnic Policy of the Polish state, is conditioned by the determinants:

- political system – including, first of all, democratic state of law and system of its institutions and bodies;
- ideological – political thought of political parties and particular political formations which take part in creating and realizing state policy, including policy towards minorities;
- political – specificity of democratic political system, based on the rule of loyalty, relation of national minorities with the state of living;
- geopolitical – importance of state policy towards minorities in international relations and relations of the state with mother countries of the minorities;
- legal – including system of international and interior law as well as accepting international standards connected with, for instance, protection of minorities rights;
- historical – origins of minorities concentration, rising on the area of the state, as well as historical heritage determining conciliatory coexistence of minority in majority milieu;
- demographic – amount and degree of organization of particular minorities (Chałupczak, 2014, p. 27).

According to information from the website of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Podstawowe) basic rights of national and ethnic minorities in Poland include i.a.:

- Prohibition of discrimination and existence of organizations which programs or activities assume or allow racial and national hate;
- Freedom of keeping and developing own language;
- Freedom of keeping customs and traditions as well as own culture;
- Right to learn language and to learn in minority language;
- Right to unhampered possibility of religious practice;
- Right to create own education institutions, cultural institutions as well as institutions which aim is to protect own religious identity;
- Right to participate in deciding of cases concerning own national identity;
- Election preferences for election committee of minority organizations.

Above-mentioned principles are guaranteed in state legislation as well as in regulations of international law. The first of mentioned groups includes acts of law as i.e: the Constitution of the Republic of Poland dated 2nd April 1997, Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages, Law on school education and Electoral Code. International law acts include for instance: Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Szczepeński, 2019, p. 221–224). Moreover, Poland signed and confirmed treaties of good-neighbour cooper-

ation with all its neighbours, which include minorities clauses about protection of people who belong to minorities (Janusz, 1999, pp. 350–351).

National and Ethnic Minorities Committee, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Ministry of National Education and Joint Committee of Government and Minority Groups (Janusz, 2010, pp. 601–610) are responsible for realization of above-mentioned acts of law and carrying out guidelines of state ethnic policy. Moreover, on local level (voivodeship) predestinated institutions to fulfill duties connected with carrying out national policy, are agents appointed by voivodes (Szczepański, 2019, p. 224).

### **Ethnic structure of the state**

According to Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional language (Ustawa) national minority will be community of citizens of Poland which comply with all these conditions: is less numerous than the rest of the state's population; is different significantly from the rest of the state's population, aims at keeping own culture, language or tradition; has awareness of its own historical national commonness being oriented to its expression and protection; has lived current territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years and identifies itself with nation organized in own country. Ethnic minority will be community which complies with all above-mentioned conditions except having own state. There are nine national minorities living in Poland (these are: Belorussian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovakian, Ukrainian and Jewish) and four ethnic (Karaitic, Lemko, Romani and Tatarian). Short characterization of mentioned groups is presented below, showing their number, place of living and religious belief.

Belarusians are present mainly in northeastern Poland, in Podlaskie Voivodeship. Mostly they are worshippers of Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the most important centre of this community national life is Białystok (Białystok). According to estimated data, between 200 and 300 thousands of this group representatives live in Poland (Idzior, 2013, p. 58–59), but official data collected during National Census of Population and Housing Census in 2011 (NSP) presents 43,878 forms of Belarusian nationality (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

The most numerous concentration of Czechs is present in Zelów (Zelów) in Łódzkie Voivodeship and is organized with Evangelical Reformed parish. Estimated data presents about three thousands representatives of this group, confirmed in NSP showing the number of 2,831 forms (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Lithuanian minority, professing Roman Catholic religion, lives in concentration on the area of northeastern Podlaskie Voivodeship, by Polish-Lithuanian border (Górecki, 2014, p. 573). Estimated data presents the number of this population between 20 and 25 thousands representatives, whereas official information collected during the census presents 7,274 national forms (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

The most numerous national minority in Poland are Germans who live mainly in the region of Upper Silesia. According to estimated data, the number of Germans was between 300 and 500 thousands people, settled first of all in Opole Voivodeship, where the most numerous German organization in Poland, the Social-Cultural Society of Ger-

mans in Opole Silesia, operates. The Society takes part consecutively in local and parliamentary elections, delegating its representatives to institutions elective on local level (to communes and poviats councils and for posts of head of communes and Mayors), as well as regional (to Self-Government of the Opolskie Voivodeship), and to all-Poland (to the Parliament). During NSP, 144,238 citizens of the Republic of Poland declared German nationality, including 78,157 who live in Opole Voivodeship (Szczepański, 2017, pp. 145–147). Distinct majority of minority representatives are members of Roman Catholic Church (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Estimated data presents number of Armenian minority between five and 15 thousands representatives (Łotocki, 2005, pp. 3–6), whereas, during NSP, Armenian nationality was declared by 1,684 Polish citizens. They live, in the first place, in Warsaw (Warszawa), Krakow (Kraków) and Gliwice and they are members mainly of Armenian Catholic Church or Latin Catholic (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Representatives of Russian minorities are in vast majority members of the Orthodox Church, number of them is estimated between 10 and 15 thousands people. During NSP, 8,796 people declared Russian nationality, mainly in Mazovian (Mazowieckie) Voivodeship, Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship and Silesian (Śląskie) Voivodeship (*Charakterystyka*).

Slovaks live mainly in northern Spiš and Orava in Małopolskie Voivodeship, as well as Silesia (Śląsk) and other regions of Poland (Ciągwa, 1997, p. 181). Estimated data presented the number of this minority between 10 and 20 thousands people, being members mainly of Roman Catholic (Chałupczak, Browarek, 2000, p. 228). During NSP 2,740 citizens of the Republic of Poland declared Slovakian nationality (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Ukrainian minority live in the Northern and Western Poland and also in its southeastern voivodeships i.e. Subcarpathian (Podkarpackie) Voivodeship and Lublin (Lubelskie) Voivodeship. According to estimated data, this community consists of between 200 and 300 thousands representatives, whereas during NSP, 38,797 forms of Ukrainian nationality were stated (Szczepański, 2019, p. 217).

The last national minority are Jews. Number of this minority is, according to estimated data, between six and 15 thousands people (Nowak-Małolepsza, Włodarczyk, 2010, p. 208). According to the results collected during NSP, Jewish nationality was declared by 7,353 Polish citizens, living mainly in Masovian (Mazowieckie) Voivodeship, Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship and Małopolskie Voivodeship (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Least numerous, among ethnic minorities, are Karaims who are believers of Karaism – religion, derived from Judaism with Hebrew alphabet used in liturgy (Dziąćko, 2006). According to estimated data, there is not numerous community of them in Poland, consisting from 150 to 250 people (Rykała, 2011, p. 107), whereas during NSP in 2011, Karaim nationality was declared by 313 people, who live i.a. in Masovian (Mazowieckie) Voivodeship, Łódzkie Voivodeship and Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Lemkos is an ethnic minority which representatives most often profess Orthodoxy or Greek Orthodox Church. According to estimated data, this community consists of 60 to 80 thousands representatives (Żurko, 1997, p. 53), whereas during NSP, 9,641 people

declared Lemko nationality, who live in Lower Silesian (Dolnośląskie) Voivodeship, Małopolskie Voivodeship and Lubuskie Voivodeship (*Charakterystyka*).

Tatar minority is the only one of the minorities which members profess Islam. Estimated data determines the number of this group of about five thousands people (Piwko, 2017, pp. 10–11), whereas during NSP, 1,828 people declared Tatar nationality. They live mainly in Podlaskie Voivodeship, Masovian (Mazowieckie) Voivodeship and Pomeranian (Pomorskie) Voivodeship (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

Romani people is an ethnic minority of about 20–30 thousands people, who live mainly in Lower Silesian Voivodeship, Małopolskie Voivodeship and Silesian Voivodeship. Members of this minority are believers mainly of Roman Catholic Church and they are included in five different groups: Bergitka Roma, the Polish Roma, the Lovash, the Kalderash and the Sinti. During NSP, 16,725 people declared Romani nationality (*Charakterystyka*, 2020).

### **The Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia**

During all period of People's Republic of Poland, native (autochthonous) people of Opole Silesia were regarded obligatory by the state authorities as Poles. Slavic (Polish) ethnic origin of a group and language used by the group (as dialect of Polish language) was to decide about being member of Polish nation, therefore Silesians were constantly denied the right to choose German national option (Kurcz, 1995, pp. 101–103). Together with erosion of the state's political system during the second part of 1980s, aspirations of “non-existent German minority” to be recognized legally, started to escalate and they were manifested i.a. demonstrated vigorously of ethnic distinction. Representatives of this minority were trying to organize their own social institutions, which were operating illegally to the authorities' opposition of accepting those institutions. The breakthrough took place alongside with the beginning of political transformation after 1989, when on 14th February 1990 it started to be possible to register the Social-Cultural Society of Germans in Opole Silesia (since 1993 it has been operating as TSKN). In accordance with the statutes, the organization aimed at promotion of culture, education and German art, representation of the minority against the state authorities within the Framework of managing of postulates concerning social and living needs of the minority (Szczepański, 2013, pp. 121–122). Today, as it is stated on the official website of the organization, its aim is to initiate and support cultural activities of German minority, develop the system of German education, promote the bilingualism among the people from Opole Silesia, as well as support institution of social type. The general objective of the cultural Programme of TSKN shall be to “promote the German culture and the culture of the German minority among the residents of the voivodeship and the area, create bonds with the country from which they come originally, carry on the tradition connected with Opole Silesia, change the negative perceiving of German people in Poland”. Furthermore the importance of cooperation between TSKN with local administration and other organizations operating in the voivodeship is emphasized (*O organizacji*, 2020). Above mentioned activities were included in two major types of the Society activities, i.e. cultural-educational and social-political.

The first one consists of educational activities:

- Aimed at the youngest audience Fairytale nights (“Bajkowe noce”) and Saturday courses for children (“Kursy sobotnie dla dzieci”);
- Contest of knowledge concerning the German minority (“Konkurs wiedzy o mniejszości niemieckiej”), Regional German language contests (“Wojewódzkie konkursy języka niemieckiego”) and “German Recitation Contest Youths recites a poem” (“Konkurs recytatorski w języku niemieckim «Młodzież recytuje poezję») – organized for school children;
- German speaking schools of football (“Niemieckojęzyczne szkoły piłkarskie”) – for children in the age between 4 and 12;
- Bilingual education (“Dwujęzyczne szkolnictwo”) – activity aimed at development of bilingual education as well as popularization and promotion of German language;
- German language courses for adults (“Kursy języka niemieckiego dla dorosłych”) – organized for people who want to acquire German language skills;
- “Deutsch – Tipps” – activity started during the period Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 which includes German language classes online.

The society also propagates bilingualism of the region postulating possibility of accepting German language as language supporting in contacts with commune bodies and using German language for creating additional names of places, street and physiographic objects, placed next to names in Polish language. Implementation of the above-mentioned solutions, specified as bilingual communes on the Society website (*Działalność kulturalno-oświatowa*, 2020), is enabled by relevant provisions of Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages (Ustawa, 2005).

Among events included in cultural activity, the most import and the longest lasting project (since 2004) are “Days of the German Culture in Opole Silesia” (“Dni Kultury Niemieckiej na Śląsku Opolskim”). These are events which take place every year, from the middle of October until the middle of November, aiming at integration and emphasis of German language culture. Among other activities of TSKN, there can be also mentioned:

- German Song Contest “Superstar” (“Konkurs Piosenki Niemieckojęzycznej «Superstar») – aiming at school children;
- All-Poland Literary (“Ogólnopolski Konkurs Literacki «Moja Niemiecka Historia») – aimed at all people, who are interested in publicizing their own and their families’ life stores, regardless the age of participants,
- Opole region without secrets and Strolls in Opole (“Opolskie bez tajemnic” and “Spacery po Opolu”) – series of meetings and trips along routs connected with history of the region and German minority;
- Powiat concerts and Advent Concert (“Koncerty Powiatowe” i “Koncert Adwentowy”) – performances promoting the minority and its culture (the second concert is organized every year before Christmas);
- “Gruss aus Oppeln” – documentary film made by TSKN about pre-war Opole;
- “Antonia – w poszukiwaniu swojej wyspy” – published by the Society bilingual (Polish-German) educational fairy-tale for the youngest children, popularizing multiculturalism and multiethnicity of Opole Voivodeship.

TSKN also takes part in organizing pilgrim’s journey to places of worship, as well as informs all interested ones about masses organized in Opole Diocese. Additionally there

are also artistic groups of the minority (subsidised from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration budget) and these are, i.a.: choirs, group of singers, youth groups and soloists (*Działalność kulturalno-oświatowa*, 2020).

Political and social activities of the Society is the second of its main areas of activeness (*Działalność społeczno-polityczna*, 2020). Among initiatives connected with the first of the above mentioned areas of action, we can find:

- Initiators of older people (“Animatory osób starszych”) – the project aiming at professional activation of people over 50 years old, targeting at preparing them to be initiators of social and civil life;
- Senior cluster (“Klaster senioralny”) – project of TSKN and local economic units which aims at creating solutions in the range of medical and caring senior service;
- Base of announcers (“Baza konferansjerów”) – listing of people recommended by the Society to compere events for the German minority (Szczepański, 2017, p. 149).

The second area of activeness – political – includes specified on the TSKN website action:

- Elections to Bundestag (“Wybory do Bundestagu”) – it is compendium of knowledge which informs representatives of the minority, who have German citizenship. about possibility of taking part in elections to Lower chamber of German parliament;
- Joint Committee of Government and Minority and Ethnic Groups (“Komisja Wspólna Rządu i Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych”) – there is information concerning this institution as the institution realizing guidelines of ethnic Policy of the state, with i.a. representatives of the German minority as this institution members;
- Polish-German Round Table and its decisions (“Polsko-Niemiecki «Okragły Stół i jego ustalenia»”) – information connected with representatives of the German minority taking part in meetings of the body, which initiate activities in favor of German citizens of Polish origins in Germany and representatives of the German minority in Poland;
- Participation in local elections in 2018 (“Udział w wyborach samorządowych w 2018 r.”) – website informs about political activities of the German minority in the last municipal elections, i.a. course of campaign and the results of the voting;
- Participation in the parliamentary election (“Udział w wyborach parlamentarnych”) – there is information about parliamentary election, during which the minority delegated representatives to race for votes, from 1990 until 2019 (*Działalność społeczno-polityczna*, 2020).

Two last of the mentioned issues, connected with the group political activeness in the process of choosing authorities, are of special importance. According with electoral law (Kodeks wyborczy) electoral committees of ethnic and national minorities are exempted from obligation of exceeding 5% minimum percentage of votes in the elections to Sejm (in the other elections no preferences were described). The German minority, as the only minority living in Poland, has been using this privilege for many years, having its representatives in the Parliament. The minority took part in the race for votes in 1990 for the first time, when they participated in by-election to Senate. Henryk Kroll, supported by the minority, took part in that election, who didn't win the mandate but achieved second best result of given support. In 1990 also municipal elections (to commune council) took place and since that time TSKN as German Minority Electoral Committee (KW



MN) became permanent participant of each next election rivalry, on local as well as parliamentary level. The most spectacular success occurred at the beginning of political transformation in Poland, when for instance in local election in 1990 out of 1,440 mandates in Opole Voivodeship KWW MN representatives obtained 380 (Ganowicz, 2016, p. 256). Moreover, as a result of parliament election in 1991 there were seven Members of Parliament of the minority in Sejm and one senator in the Senate. Although, as the years went by, significant decrease of support for the minority candidates (in every of election arena) took place, still TSKN is important political force, especially in Self-Government of the Opole Vovoideship (Ibid., p. 257). In this context, it is worth to notice, that considering meeting needs of the members fully by the Society (both material needs and spiritual demands) the Society gained the status of ethnic party. And it, as in the opinion of J. Mieczkowski, will mean system player, "which main aim is formulating, protection and supporting interests of given ethnic society" (Mieczkowski, 2014, p. 182). In consequence, voting for a candidate proposed by TSKN, differs from ordinary support of a politician during election in favour of voting for a person because of his/her ethnicity, not because of presented by him/her programme (Berdychowska, Kazanecki, Madajczyk, Szamel, Wierzycka, 2003, p. 7).

Except information about cultural-educational activities and social-political activities of the organization, its website includes also information (Strefa) about activity of German Circles of Friends („Deutscher Freundschaftskreis” – DFK). According to the Society Statute, there are basic local units of TSKN over which the Board of the organization is supervisory body and control authority (*Statut*, 2016). On the website, profiles of each circle is given, their activities are described, as well as possibility of applying for financial means in the framework of activating meetings places (“Ożywianie domów spotkań”) is mentioned. Moreover we can find information as, i.a.: list of required documents and reporting procedures, data concerning conditions of receiving and settlement subvention by particular circles, and also legal advice concerning gaining German citizenship by members of the minority and their families (Strefa). Furthermore, the Society publishes job offers and occupational consulting offers, information about grants scholarships and trainings and apprenticeship in TSKN (*Kariera*, 2020), as well as digital library of publications concerning the minority (*Medioteka*, 2020).

### Final remarks

As in 1989 political transformation started in Poland, Policy of the state towards national and ethnic minority was also changed. Past assimilative efforts and diversification action towards particular national groups were replaced with total change of system, rules, aims and forms of ethnic policy realization. Complex legislative system was created, based on international and national law standards, as well as institutional including parties responsible for realization of principles of specified policy. Since then, the concept of the policy, was not only providing ethnic non-Polish groups possibility of keeping their own national distinction, but also creating conditions for the groups participation in social and political life of the state, including Parliament work (Chafup-

czak, 2014, p. 34). Referring to above-mentioned assumptions of R. Zenderowski and J. Pieńkowski (2014, p. 203) it can be stated, that important aim of contemporary ethnic Policy became the acceptance of multiculturalism and multiethnicity of the state. Finding, that among presented by T. Browarek models, characteristic for present-day Poland will be pluralistic type, based on society group equality (Browarek, 2018, p. 38) becomes correct. It seems, that confirmation of research hypothesis formulated in the introduction, according to which contemporary ethnic policy not only enables keeping national identity of the German minority in Opole Silesia, but also creates appropriate conditions to participate in public life of the region, shall be correct.

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## Działalność Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Niemców na Śląsku Opolskim w aspekcie polityki etnicznej państwa polskiego

### Streszczenie

Jednymi z najważniejszych pryncypiów polityki etnicznej państwa jest zapewnienie mniejszościom narodowym i etnicznym możliwości zachowania własnej odrębności narodowej, a także umożliwienie im partycypacji w życiu publicznym, w tym – politycznym. Zamieszkująca Polskę mniejszość niemiecka, będąca najliczniejszą spośród mniejszości narodowych, czynnie uczestniczy w realizacji powyższych wytycznych. Występuje najliczniej na obszarze Górnego Śląska, gdzie od 1990 r. funkcjonuje największa instytucja mniejszościowa w kraju – Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Niemców na Śląsku Opolskim (dalej TSKN).

Podstawowym celem powstania niniejszego tekstu było podjęcie próby charakterystyki działalności TSKN w aspekcie założeń polityki etnicznej państwa polskiego. Wykorzystano następujące narzędzia i metody badawcze: historyczną, komparatystyczną, analizy źródeł i krytyki piśmiennictwa. Istotne miejsce wśród badań zajęła również analiza zasobów Internetu, przede wszystkim stron Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji oraz witryn TSKN. Postawiono hipotezę badawczą, zgodnie z którą polityka etniczna III Rzeczypospolitej nie tylko umożliwiła zachowanie tożsamości narodowej mniejszości niemieckiej zamieszkałej na Śląsku Opolskim, ale również stwarza jej odpowiednie warunki do uczestniczenia w życiu publicznym regionu. W wyniku przeprowadzonego procesu badawczego powyższa hipoteza została zweryfikowana pozytywnie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka etniczna, mniejszość niemiecka, Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Niemców na Śląsku Opolskim